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The Christmas Spirit

A Poetic Fantasy in Two Acts

by

Franz and Lillian Rickaby

Produced Originally by
The Dakota Playmakers
of the
University of North Dakota

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Published by

The Normanden Publishing Company

Grand Forks, North Dakota.

*PS1921

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by
Franz Rickaby

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FOREWORD

This Christmas Fantasy is in all ways a product of the dramatic laboratory of the University of North Dakota. It was written in the fall of 1917 as work in the University course in Dramatic Composition, at that time under the guidance of Professor Frederick H. Koch. The Dakota Playmakers of the University, an organization warmly devoted to native material and art, presented the play as their Christmas program that year, giving one production of it on their Play-Stage at the University, and another at the Metropolitan Theatre in Grand Forks. In response to a considerable request, the Society presented it again in Grand Forks at Christmas time, 1919.

Below is the cast of characters for the play as originally produced:

Old Silence.....Mr. J. A. Taylor
Moonmother.....Miss Jean Taylor
The Moonbeams:
- Silver.....Miss Agnes O'Connor
- Crystal.....Miss Rilla Woods
- Nimble.....Miss Glenna Garvin
- Flicker.....Miss Marjorie Cook
- Bright.....Miss Marian Torgerson
- Sparkle.....Miss Lila Warnkin

Perk.....Miss Vera Disbrow
The Herald.....Mr. Clarence Robbins
Rumble.....Mr. Harold Wylie
His Sons:
- Swift.....Mr. Harold Shaft
- Cloud.....Mr. James A. Rosoff
- Flame.....Mr. George Crain

Evening Star (Princess Golden).....Miss Emily Squires
Morning Star (Princess Brilliant)....Miss Harriet Mills
The Light-King.....Mr. Melvin Petterson
The Little Stars.....Alden Squires, Robert Young, Jack Lewis, Jack Woolsey, Roger Becker, John Hosig, Helen Ryan, Margaret Webster, Anna Lou Hazlett, Dorothy Solon, Lois Budge, Camilla Redick.
The King's Train-bearer.....Vernon Squires

The Christmas Spirit

CHARACTERS

Old Silence, the aged watchman on the Moon.
Moonmother, the mother of the Moonbeams.
Silver, *Crystal*, *Nimble*, *Sparkle*, *Flicker*, *Bright* — Moonbeams.
Perk, a mischievous Moon-brownie.
The Herald, the Light-King's messenger.
Old Rumble, the Storm-King.
Cloud, *Swift*, *Flame* — Old Rumble's sons.
Winkle, *Twinkle* — Star-elves.
Princess Golden (later Evening Star).
Princess Brilliant (later Morning Star).
The Star-children (twelve in number; not named).
The Light-King.
The King's Train-bearer.
The Splendid Stranger.

Synopsis

Act I—*Scene:* The Moon; the Moonbeam's home.
Time: Almost 2000 years ago; sunset.

Act II—*Scene:* The Sun-Palace of the Light-King; the throne-room.
Time: Immediately following that of Act I.

The Christmas Spirit

THE PROLOG

As the theater darkens, there come sounds of chimes, far, far off. Then the sound of women's voices singing, sweetly, softly, as though in the distance, "Silent Night, Holy Night." Then suddenly, before the curtain, appears the CHRISTMAS SPIRIT, *a small fairy-like creature, shining as the sun-light, who speaks smilingly:*

Dear children, young and old,
The season of the gift has come again,
The time of peace and good will among men,
When steepled bells ring out their happy songs
And loving kindness to the world belongs.

Have you not wondered, as you thought of this,
What caused these tides of happiness and bliss,
And why the Yuletide is so deeply blessed,
Richest of all times, so different from the rest?

It is the Christmas Spirit who is near,
A kind of fairy bringer of good cheer,
Who visits now the hearts of young and old,
And brings them riches more valuable than gold.
(Moving forward; confidentially.)

Kind friends, *I* am the Christmas Spirit.
I came to set the human heart aglow.
But my name
Was Silver when the first glad Christmas came
Upon the Earth so many years ago.

Many Christmas facts you, friends, already know:
You know the story of the crowded Inn;
You know the story of the shepherds on
The hills of Palestine, and how, ere dawn,
The night was filled with light, the air with song,
And the heavens peopled with an angel throng.
You know the story of the Christmas Star,
And how the Wise Men traveled from afar
To worship where the Baby Jesus lay
In Bethlehem town at break of Christmas day.

But I and certain others know far more
Of Christmas than has e'er been told before.

It is a lovely story—one that you
Have never heard, could hardly think were true
Were someone else to tell it to you new.

I remember well that long ago.
I saw the skies that night, the earth below;
I saw the shepherds as they watched their sheep
While sad old Earth was fast asleep.
And I remember how we Moonbeams went
To Earth that night, wherever we were sent;
And how the Light-King had us summoned back
To come before his throne; and how, alack!
I was so late that Rumble, the Storm-King, came
With his three mean sons, Swift, Cloud, and Flame.
Flame held a light; Swift knocked me down;
Cloud got me wet; and with his roar and frown
Old Rumble almost frightened me to death.
But I at last got home, quite out of breath.

And then—but if I'd have you stay
I must not tell you *all* about our play
Before it starts.

And once again I add,
This story is for child-like hearts and glad.
To listen, then, and see you may remain
If you will come and live with us again;
If you'll forget the things that grown-ups do
And just be children for an hour or two.

ACT ONE

It is dark once more, and still. We have the feeling that we are going back, back, back through hundreds of years, a thousand years, almost two thousand years. We seem almost to dream. Then gradually in the silence and the darkness we see a strange scene: on the Moon, the home of the Moonbeams. There are some large mossy boulders lying about here and there, and the place is filled with a deep red glow, for it is the time we call sunset.

At the left sits the figure of an old man, OLD SILENCE, *the aged watchman, on a boulder, leaning forward on his long staff and gazing out into space toward the sunset. The deep red light begins to fade and the place is gradually filled with the beautiful blue moonlight.*

Suddenly there is a stir behind one of the boulders, and a little fairy-like figure, little SILVER, *half rises and looks about as though determining the time of day, stands up, then turns and*

runs lightly to the side of OLD SILENCE *and kneels there. He puts his arm about her and together they gaze out into the fading sunset.*
While they are there, MOONMOTHER *comes silently in at the other side. As she commences to speak,* OLD SILENCE *slowly rises and goes out toward the sunset, leaving little* SILVER *looking after him, still kneeling.*

MOTHER:

'Tis night again. I must my children call.
Sunset has vanished. They must one and all
Go down to Earth and glorify its night.—
Silence, the aged watchman, leaves us now
As all the earthly living creatures bow
Their heads to slumber, and the day takes flight.—
(Goes swiftly and calls behind several of the boulders.)
Awake, my Sparkle! Oh, awake! Awake!
For you must play on pond and lake.—
Awake, my Crystal, Moonbeam small and fair!
For you shall whisper to the calm night air.—
Nimble! Nimble! You told the fairy queen
That you'd return when Evening came again.—
Flicker! What? Make bright those lovely eyes!
You cannot sleep forever, child. Arise!—
Bright! Bright! It's late. Make haste then all the more.
Come, you must shine. That's what the night is for.—
O pretty Silver, your sisters will be gone
And leave you here. Come, sleep again at dawn!
(She finds that SILVER *is not in her place.)*
Ah! Silver up again before I call!
So was she up last night before them all;
And as I find her now, so found her then—
There, musing, where Old Silence watches when
The Moonbeams are asleep.—I'll call again.
(Goes softly towards SILVER.*)*
My Silver-beam, what is there in the west
That you should sit and gaze, while all the rest
Are waking to begin their work and play?

SILVER:

Moonmother dear,
I love to sit with Silence here
And watch the sunset as the night draws near.
He brings me gifts from many a distant star;
And, sitting by his side, I see so far
It almost frightens me. And lately I have felt
So strange in here, *(puts her hand to her heart)*
as though my heart would melt

And I be someone else. When day has flown
And Silence leaves me sitting here alone,
I seem to hear sweet music flowing down
Around me, and a voice that keeps repeating,
"Love is greater than a prince's crown,
Love is greater than a crown."
And I often wonder what it means—
I wonder—and it seems—

MOTHER:

(With loving concern)—What, Silver dear,
Are you not happy in your Moon-home here?

SILVER:

Oh *(happily)* Of course! I am!—Why, Mother, see,
Our sister Nimble's fast asleep.

(Other MOONBEAMS *are awaking one by one, and are sitting, each on her own boulder, rubbing eyes and stretching, very much like earthly children.* NIMBLE *awaking slowly, speaks very drowsily at first, but brightens up soon.)*

NIMBLE:

Moonmother dear, I—I—I am afraid
Too long I stayed on Earth today and played
When all my sisters had come home.—But then
I must awake and go to play again!

MOTHER:

Indeed you must!—Now, Moonbeam children mine,
Go wash your little faces till they shine
There in the sparkling brook, each one of you.
And as you wash, be sure you make the dew.

SPARKLE:

Oh, yes—the dew! Let's quickly wash!

(At this all six Moonbeams run to where a little stream flows beside a huge boulder and wash, actually splashing. They flick the water-drops off their fingers over the edge of the Moon, and laugh and talk as they watch the dew as it falls down, down to the earth below.)

BRIGHT:

Oh my!
I had forgotten that!

CRYSTAL:

And so had I!

FLICKER:

I like the dew. I like to see it fall.
See! This is resting on the grasses tall.

BRIGHT:

I like to see it glisten on the grass.—
Oh, there! I've wet my moonlight dress, alas!

(She wrings out the wet place in her skirt. Meanwhile NIMBLE, *her fingers dripping with water from the spring, has run to the other side and is sprinkling dew over that edge.)*

NIMBLE:

I like *this* best. For drops here tossed
Leave here as dew, but reach the earth as frost.
See, Mother dear! The dead grey land is white.
Is frost not beautiful falling through the night?
And is it not most strange how it can be
That over there on grass and shrub and tree
We see the dew, while on the Earth down here
We see the sparkling frost?

(She points out the different places as she speaks.)

MOTHER:

Yes, Nimble dear.
When dew falls through the cold, it turns all white.—
Earth-children call it "freezing." Dew-drops bright,
We find, do glisten where the world is warm.
Here, where 'tis cold, the frost in crystal form
Falls down; but over there, where sister looks,

(Pointing to where FLICKER *is)*

It falls as dew, as clear—

*(*SILVER, *who has gone to sprinkle the dew over another part, has suddenly paused, going intently toward the Earth. She finally exclaims, interrupting* MOONMOTHER*)*

SILVER:

Why, what is that? A thirsty field!
Poor little flowers! How often have I kneeled
Among their fragrant leaves! They're wilted now
Because they are so parched and dry.—I vow
I will not let them die! Give me a spray
Of Moon-flower vine, and let me now repay
Them for the fragrant hours they gave me.

(She plucks a spray of the vine growing beside her, runs and dips it in the stream, then sprinkles it out over the edge vigorously. She does this two more times, while the other Moonbeams crowd about the place and watch, remarking and sympathizing.)

BRIGHT:

See!
How glad the flowers are! They drink the dew
And are refreshed.

SPARKLE:

Yes; they shall smile anew
When next they greet the sun.

SILVER:

(Returning from her third trip) Do they revive?—
How good it is to see them still alive!
How blind I was not to have seen their thirst
Before I did! I did not see at first.—
See how they bend beneath the crystal weight
Of dew-drops!—I might have been too late!

FLICKER:

(To BRIGHT*)* It's always Silver who is finding things like this
To do. We see the happiness and bliss;
But she sees suffering.

BRIGHT:

I'm sure there's much
That *we* can do. Let's get some dew and touch
Some sufferer as Silver-beam has done.

(The five MOONBEAMS *turn and go towards the spring, but* SILVER *remains looking at her field, musing and smiling, while* MOONMOTHER *watches beside her. But just as the* MOONBEAMS *are dipping into the spring,* PERK *leaps up from behind the boulder to the top of it shouting* "Hi!" *and stands up there with his arms akimbo. The sisters cry out and run back in fear, and* SILVER *and* MOONMOTHER *turn suddenly to see.* PERK *holds his sides and laughs heartily.)*

PERK:

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!
Are you frightened? Well—my name is Perk.
I move with a jump and stop with a *jerk.*
See?

(He jumps so as to land exactly on the word "jerk." *The frightened sisters retreat toward their mother and scold him heartily.)*

CRYSTAL:

Oh Perk, you needn't tell *us* who you are!
We'd know your face and foolishness afar.

NIMBLE:

We'd know you from afar. And I should say
I'd much prefer to know you *just that way!*

PERK:

You act as though I'd covered you with dirt.—
O Silver, come and tell them they're not hurt!

SILVER:

Well, truth to say, I see no broken bones,
And nothing that need keep old Mistress Jones
From having moonlight through her window shine.
I'm sure the Moonbeams shouldn't scold and whine.
There! Run to Mother. She will smoothe you out.

*(*SILVER *comes up, inspecting the injured sisters as she passes them, and speaks laughingly. The sisters go pouting to their* MOTHER *who smoothes out their dresses.* SILVER *sits on a boulder near her and calls* PERK.*)*

SILVER:

Perk, come here.—You see, my sisters pout?

PERK:

(As he comes.) See it? I should say I do.
(He seats himself on the ground beside SILVER'S *boulder, very affectionately, and quiets down considerably.)*

SILVER:

How dare
You plague them so? You know *I* shouldn't care
If you'd play jokes on me. But they can't bear
Your liveliness. Why don't you jump at me
Sometimes? Why, Perk?

PERK:

Well, Silver-beam, you see
I just don't feel like playing jokes on you.
You scream, and make believe that you're afraid;
But I can tell you are not. And when I've played
Some old mean trick, and you pretend you're scared,
I feel ashamed, and wish I hadn't dared.
I—feel I've misbehaved, and—that I should—
Oh, well—you make a fellow wish that he was good.—
(His mischief returns.)
But Silver-beam, those sisters are the fun!
They scare so good! My, how they yell and run!—
And Silver, you don't care? I give my word

I'll hurt no one. You know you've never heard
Of any harm I've done.

SILVER:

No, Perk, I never have.

PERK:

(Leaping up and dancing about.) Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

SPARKLE:

Now what? Has he been scaring Silver, too?

*(*SPARKLE *runs to* SILVER, *but takes care to keep a good distance between her and* PERK *as she goes. She throws her arms around* SILVER.*)*

But Silver, guess what we are going to do!
We're going to practise our dance once more,—
The new one,—remember?

(She goes through a step or two of the dance.)

—just once before
We go to Earth. Moonmother said we might.
She would not say at first. She thought the night
Was wearing on, and that we should not wait;
Then she remembered that the Moon rose late.
And so—we have our dance. Come, sister, come!

SILVER:

The dance! The Moonbeam dance! Come, sisters, come!

(Hand in hand they run and join the rest, and all get quickly in place for the dance as very light, soft music commences. They dance, MOONMOTHER *looking on proudly, and* PERK, *perched on a boulder, keeping time to the music by waving his hands and nodding his head. When the dance ends,* MOONMOTHER *applauds them softly.)*

MOTHER:

It's beautiful, my own!—But now to work! To play!
The fairies wait. But ere the break of day
Be home in safety. And at play and work
Be diligent.—I'll guard your playmate, Perk!

(She says this last laughingly as she puts her arm about PERK. *The* MOONBEAMS *look over the edge in different places.)*

NIMBLE:

Farewell, sisters mine! I see the fairies.

SPARKLE:

I see the blue lake!

BRIGHT:

And I shall shine!
That's what the night is for.

CRYSTAL:

I'll whisper to
The still night air.

FLICKER:

And I shall too!

SILVER:

Ah, *I* shall first my thirsty flowers see,
And hear their fragrant whispered thanks to me.

(As they dance out, NIMBLE, *in trying to pass* CRYSTAL *tears* CRYSTAL'S *veil.)*

CRYSTAL:

(Stopping angrily)
Now see what you have done! You've torn my veil.

(All stop and turn back.)

FLICKER:

What's happened? Why does Crystal weep and wail?

CRYSTAL:

(Angrily) Yes, why? Just see what hasty Nimble's done!
This veil was woven in the Palace of the Sun,
And Princess Brilliant got it just for me.
But now it's torn, and it can never be
Replaced or mended.—Why must Nimble run
To meet those fairies? That is costly fun.

NIMBLE:

Oh, Crystal, I am sorry!

MOTHER:

(Examining the torn veil.) Let me see—
I have some sunshine veiling that will be
A perfect match; and I can surely mend
The tear so neatly, make the stitches blend
So closely that the patch will be unseen.

CRYSTAL:

The patch! What Moonbeam likes to have a patch?

SPARKLE:

But Crystal, let it go tonight. I'll snatch
Some silver sheen that wavers over the lake
And bring it back to you.

BRIGHT:

And *I* will take—

CRYSTAL:

How does all of that this gift replace?
I will not go to Earth, not show my face
With a great big ugly patch here in my veil!

*(*SILVER *has untied her own lovely veil and taken it off, and now comes forward with it in her hands.)*

SILVER:

Old Silence cut me this from the tail
Of some bright comet as it sailed the sky.
There is none other like it. This is why:
No one but Silence goes where comets sail.
Here, Crystal, you may have my veil.

ALL:

Silver!

NIMBLE:

O Silver, I'm so mean!

FLICKER:

Why, sister dear,
You must not give your veil away. I fear
You'll be unhappy.

(But CRYSTAL *slowly takes the veil as* SILVER *holds it out.* MOONMOTHER *puts it on* CRYSTAL *and ties it.)*

SILVER:

(Laughing happily.) I unhappy? No.
It sets our hearts with happiness aglow
To give the things we love. It is no task
To give unvalued things—

BRIGHT:

(Resolutely) But I shall ask
Old Silence for another one for you,
For now you've none.

SILVER:

Oh yes; this one will do.

(She picks up CRYSTAL'S *old veil and hands it to* MOONMOTHER *who ties it on her and smoothes it out.)*

We haven't time to mend the torn place now,
Moonmother dear. But then, I'll not allow
Such little things to keep me from my work.—
Come, sisters, let's be gone.—Good-bye, old Perk!

(As SILVER *trips past* PERK, *she pinches his cheek playfully. After the* MOONBEAMS *have gone,* MOONMOTHER *goes about "picking up" after her children. She finds the bit of vine with which* SILVER *sprinkled the thirsty field, and picks it up as though to keep it among her treasures. But* PERK, *filled with indignation, is raging about like a regular little storm.)*

PERK:

This Silver-beam's the only one that's fit
To shine on earth. The rest are not a bit
Like her. They'd be lots better if they were!

MOTHER:

Pray don't be harsh, now Perk, to little girls.

(She sits a moment on a boulder.)

PERK:

Well, what of that! With their flounces and their curls!
Why can't they be like her?

MOTHER:

(Softly) I don't know why.
She's different—

(MOONMOTHER *is suddenly interrupted by the blowing of a trumpet outside.)*

PERK:

My! What's that?

MOTHER:

(Looking out) It is the Light-King's Herald.

(The HERALD *enters briskly from the right and stands just inside the doorway.)*

HERALD:

From our great and gracious Sovereign,
The King of Light,
To his loyal children on the Moon—his greetings.
It is our Sovereign's wish that these,

His subjects, come this night at midnight
To the Palace of the Sun.
There will he let be known the reason for
This hasty summoning.
He asks that every Moonbeam be at once
Recalled from Earth, from work and play alike.
Bring back the Moonbeams, then, from earthly lands
And dress them forth to greet their sovereign King
Whose smile is sunshine and whose palace glows
In golden splendor.

*(*MOONMOTHER *bows her head slightly, and the* HERALD *exit. Just as the* HERALD *steps out one listening might hear a sound of thunder, ever so faint in the distance.* MOONMOTHER *does not notice this. She looks about.)*

MOTHER:

Why Perk! It's almost midnight now!
The Moonbeams must be called.

PERK:

I don't see how
The King has waited 'till so late to tell
His wishes.

MOTHER:

(Continuing) Look you call the Moonbeams well—
For you must call them. Every bush and tree,
Each pond and lake, each flowery bed you see,
In every bower you must look and call.
Be faithful, Perk, for we must have them all.

PERK:

Moonmother dear, as diligent I'll be
In searching as in frightening, you'll see. *(Exit.)*

(As PERK *goes out, there is perhaps another bit of thunder this time slightly louder though still faint.)*

MOTHER:

Why should the Light-King wish us to appear?
I feel that some great happening is near,—
And yet, I know him to be wise and good,
And kind and loving, as a great king should.
My children he would see in such quick season
For some high purpose, for some holy reason.

(More thunder. MOONMOTHER *notices it, apparently for the first time, and looks out again, frightened and worried. As she speaks, the storm increases, the thunder nearer and louder. The air grows gradually darker. There are oc-*

casional flashes of lightning, with increasing frequency, and the wind begins to moan.)

Why! The Storm-King, Rumble, is abroad!
Both heaven and earth struck silent, fearful, awed.
My children! Would that they had never gone
To Earth this night! Oh, would that it were dawn!—
Suppose Perk cannot find them! And suppose
He sees the Storm-King coming on and grows
So frightened that he leaves his earthly search
And leaves unvisited some glade, some spectral birch!—
But—I see them coming, sped by fear!
For Rumble and his sons draw near.—
And there is Perk;—But has he found them all?—
I'd call them, but they could not hear me call.—
Now draw they nearer.—They have paused—
The air grows dark!—What mishap could have caused
Their waiting there?—But now they start once more.
They now draw near, more quickly than before—
And now they reach, unharmed, my very door!

(The MOONBEAMS *enter running.* SILVER *is missing. They all try to tell* MOONMOTHER *at once. The air grows darker and the peals of thunder are louder and more frequent. The wind rises gradually.)*

NIMBLE:

Moonmother dear, our sister is not here!

MOTHER:

What!

CRYSTAL:

I begged her to come back, Moonmother dear—

BRIGHT:

And so did I—

FLICKER:

But she seemed not to hear—

(The MOONBEAMS *huddle about* MOONMOTHER, *who sits on a boulder and draws them closer about her. The gloom grows deeper and deeper, as the storm settles down upon them.)*

SPARKLE:

We all just begged, and asked her what she saw;
But not one good answer could we draw.—

MOTHER:

But where is Perk?

BRIGHT:

He would not let her go
Back to the darkening Earth alone, and so—
He went along, arguing, asking all the while
Why she returned,—but she would only smile
And say, "I must go back. They need me there."
But who or what she saw, we could not hear.

(Suddenly, with a terrible crash of thunder and gust of wind the STORM-KING *and his three sons,* SWIFT, CLOUD, *and* FLAME, *rush in, and the place is dark except for the almost continuous flashes of lightning. As the* MOONBEAMS *huddle about* MOONMOTHER, OLD RUMBLE *stands looking at the little group, holding his sides and laughing boisterously. His sons dart about here and there,* FLAME *flashing the lightning on the frightened people. At last* RUMBLE *stops laughing to roar about. As he speaks he strides back and forth before the little group.)*

RUMBLE:

What! No welcome? No greeting for Old Rumble?
Ho! Ho! Ho!—The mighty hill-tops crumble
When I strike them with my fist; and great trees bend
When down the valleys I my storm-breath send.—
The places of the Earth *roar-r-r* when I speak.—
What! Still no welcome for me? Why so meek?
Come,—dance for me.—So, Moonbeams, you will not?
You all defy me, by the Light-King taught?—
Then I defy the Light-King. I will go
My earthward way, where I have seen below
Your foolish sister, with that clownish Perk,
Go speeding back to do some silly work.—
I'll capture her, and she shall go with me.
With you again then she shall never be.—
What of the Light-King then? What can *he* do?—
Come, Swift, and Cloud, and Flame, for each of you
Must do his part to catch this Moonbeam maid.—
You capture her; I'll keep her heart dismayed
With dark and thundering.

(As OLD RUMBLE *and his sons go raging out, the storm reaches its highest. The thunder clatters and rolls; the lightning flashes constantly, and the wind shrieks and whines like mad; and one can hear the rain driven down in torrents.* MOONMOTHER *rushes over and looks out toward the Earth, while the* MOONBEAMS *crouch fearfully beside the boulder, covering their eyes or ears with their hands.)*

MOTHER:

Poor little Silver! No place is there to hide
In woods or hills, or in the prairies wide,
From the raging Storm-King's wrath.

CRYSTAL:

(Crying) Silver-beam!

MOTHER:

The lightnings on the broad lakes gleam.
The three sons lash the night-filled air
And search for little Silver everywhere. *(In fear)*
Can they have taken her?—No! See,—she comes,
Limp in the loving arms of Old Silence.

(Enter OLD SILENCE, *slowly, bearing* SILVER *in his arms, all wet and grimy and bedraggled, and apparently unconscious.* PERK *follows also drenched and storm-beaten, carrying* OLD SILENCE'S *staff.* SILENCE *puts* SILVER *down on one of the boulders, and* MOONMOTHER *supports her while the rest crowd about. No one speaks, for no one can speak while* SILENCE *is present.*

As the old watchman bends over the little form anxiously, SILVER *opens her eyes and looks about dazedly, then smiles faintly.* OLD SILENCE *smiles contentedly at them all, takes his staff and goes slowly out, left. They all watch him, and as he disappears, the last murmur of thunder dies away in the distance and the place becomes filled again with the beautiful Moonlight. All turn toward* SILVER.*)*

MOTHER:

Speak to us, Silver.

SILVER:

(Softly) I—I—love you all.

*(*NIMBLE *hugs her.)*

NIMBLE:

But Silver dear, your frock is wet and torn!—
How can she go with us, all forlorn?

MOTHER:

Alas, dear child, I do not know. This grime
And wet is no king's guest; and it is time
We set out for the Palace of the Sun.

CRYSTAL:

If she'd have listened, as she should have done—

PERK:

(Indignantly) What's that you say?

CRYSTAL:

I say, alas! alack!
If she had only listened and come back
With all of us instead of turning 'round—

PERK:

Why, she'd have been as dry, as sweetly gowned
As all of you; but not been half so rich.
For I went back with Silver, and I know
Just where she went, and just what made her go.
What I have seen tonight I would not trade
For all your pretty frocks. She is repaid.
It was the sweetest face—

MOTHER:

No story now,
My Perk; it is too late.

*(*SILVER *rises, still weak, but smiling.)*

SILVER:

Yes; you must not allow
My disobedience to delay you there
Before the Light-King's throne. The palace glare
Must not see me, for I shall stay at home
And keep the house, like any naughty gnome.—
You'll bring me all the news? And tell me all
That happens to you there?

MOTHER:

Oh, not at all!
The King has called for every one of you.
We all must go.

SILVER:

(Dismayed) Oh, Perk, what shall I do!

PERK:

Do? Why, go! And leave the rest to me.
I'll tell a strange new story, you shall see. *(Turning)*
Well—are you ready, with your pretty frocks
And nice dry stitches? Little glossy-locks!

MOTHER:

Now Perk, that is enough. Don't be so rude.—

Come, children. *(Gently)* Silver, you need not intrude
Yourself into the brightest palace glare,
But stand somewhat withdrawn, aloof somewhere.

(Exeunt, left, the MOONBEAMS *going first,* SILVER *and* MOONMOTHER *following;* PERK *last. After the others are out,* PERK *stops a moment to explain indignantly:)*

PERK:

Aloof somewhere! Far better she should stand
In front of all the rest. I'll bet this hand
I'll tell them such a tale that they shall stare,
And she shall stand right *in* the palace glare!

(With this threat he goes stamping out, and after he has gone, OLD SILENCE *walks slowly in from the right and takes his place on the boulder as we saw him at first, leaning forward on his staff and gazing into the distance.)*

—CURTAIN—

ACT II

(The rising of the curtain reveals the throne-room of the LIGHT-KING'S *Palace on the Sun, rich golden brown with saffron hangings. At either side, downstage, a door. At the back, facing the audience, is the throne, pure white, reached by a series of broad steps, also white, extending around three sides of the throne.*
At either side of the throne, following the line of the wall and extending nearly to the entrance, a white bench. On the dais asleep, his head pillowed comfortably on his arm, lies WINKLE. *Soon appears* TWINKLE, *emerging grotesquely from behind the left seat, or entering the left door. After some elfin pantomime,* TWINKLE *takes a fancy feather, which he wears on a string about his neck, apparently for this purpose, and tickles the foot of the sleeping* WINKLE. *The latter kicks.* TWINKLE *tickles the sleeper's hand, his ear, his knee, each time securing vehement response. He finally tickles his neck, whereupon* WINKLE *awakes, sits up blinking.* TWINKLE *falls back into the bench, right, laughing heartily.*

TWINKLE:

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

WINKLE:

Elf!

TWINKLE:

(Sobering quickly) You're one yourself!

WINKLE:

But not a mean one!

TWINKLE:

(Sanctimoniously) Who's ever seen one?

WINKLE:

I have!

TWINKLE:

You! When?

WINKLE:

Just now.

TWINKLE:

And how?

WINKLE:

How? With these! *(Points knowingly to each eye.)*

TWINKLE:

(Very seriously) That's very strange.
One has to be awake
To see things—and not dream them.

WINKLE:

(Valiantly) I was awake!

TWINKLE:

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

WINKLE:

My eyes were not shut tight.
I saw you come—

TWINKLE:

Where from?

WINKLE:

There!

(He points to the door on the right. TWINKLE *controls with difficulty another burst of laughter.)*

You came sneaking—
Like this.—

(Comes down and mimics.)

Said I to myself,
"I'll let that elf
Have his foolish joke this time."
And so I let you tickle me
In the neck—like this.
Then I jumped up
And pretended to be mad.
(In derision) Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

TWINKLE:

Just in the neck, you say.

WINKLE:

(Wags his head wisely) You see; *I know!*

TWINKLE:

You know
A little more than nothing—yes.
Ignorant sleepyhead, come hither.

(He puts his arm around WINKLE *and draws him over to the seat at the right, where they sit.)*

While you have thus been guarding the throne
With your keen-edged sword of slumber,
A new strange man has come
With some word for our King.
It is not known exactly why he comes,
But 'tis said—

(Punches his failing listener)

Listen, sleepyhead—
'Tis said that sometime,

(With the air of releasing a great secret)

Someone's to be chosen
And sent somewhere
For something!

WINKLE:

(Drowsily) Well, I declare!
You say, *sometime.*—When?

TWINKLE:

(Innocently) I don't know.

WINKLE:

(Continuing) Someone's to be chosen.—Who?

TWINKLE:

We haven't heard.

WINKLE:

And sent somewhere.—Where?

TWINKLE:

Well, *(lamely)*
Of course—we've not been told.

WINKLE:

For something.—What for?

TWINKLE:

(Rather vexed) I said
That no one knew exactly!

WINKLE:

(Stifles a yawn) Then—why stay awake?
(He makes as though to lie down on the bench.)

TWINKLE:

(Trying vainly to keep him up)
To find out things, silly.
No one learns anything asleep!
And our King has sent his messenger—

WINKLE:

(Ever so slightly interested)
His messenger? Where to?

TWINKLE:

(Caught up again. Hesitating)
I—

WINKLE:

—don't know! *(In disgust)* Bah!
When you find out a thing or two—
(Yawns and stretches.)
If, indeed, you ever do—
Just—just tickle me again. *(He sleeps.)*

(PRINCESS GOLDEN *enters suddenly, left, seemingly excited. She carries a crown and a small piece of cloth. She sees the other two and listens.)*

TWINKLE:

(Jumping up) Never! Lazy thing!
I'll never wake you,
Old heavy-eyes! Lump of sleep!

*(*GOLDEN *begins polishing the crown industriously and coughs slightly to draw attention.)*

GOLDEN:

A-hem!

TWINKLE:

(Turning) Oh, it's you, Princess Golden?

GOLDEN:

(Almost breathlessly)

Yes, it's I. And, Twinkle,
I'm so excited!
Aren't you and Winkle?

(In the speeches that follow, GOLDEN *polishes the crown intermittently as the talks, divided between that duty and excited telling.)*

TWINKLE:

(Very gravely) Winkle is! I'm not.

(A slight pause as GOLDEN *looks a moment at* WINKLE, *who snores softly by way of greeting.)*

GOLDEN:

(Turning back to TWINKLE*)*

The strange, calm visitor who came
To us from some far distant court,
Is with us still—

(They come together and sit on the lowest step of the dais.)

And still we know not who he is.
But some have heard him speak,
And all have seen him
Walking in the Palace garden.

TWINKLE:

I have seen him too.

GOLDEN:

We call him "Splendid,"—
Not for what he wears,
But for what he is.
His soft, kind voice, his loving smile—

TWINKLE:

(Nodding) I know. He smiled at me.

GOLDEN:

And, Twinkle, here's more news:
Some one of us, here in the Light-King's court,
Will be chosen this very night
To be sent—guess where!

TWINKLE:

(Eagerly) Oh—where? I couldn't guess!

GOLDEN:

To the Earth!

TWINKLE:

(Jumping up) To the Earth? Tonight?
(He goes as though to waken WINKLE, *but pauses. To himself:)*
No! I'll not!
Have your nap out, Snore-box!
(Goes back to PRINCESS GOLDEN.)
Tell me more, Princess Golden.

GOLDEN:

There's yet not much one really knows to tell,
But what there is, that little I know well.
There's to be in the Earth's greatest palace
A wonderful ball, they say,
Where the finest of ladies and lords will come,
And the finest of music will play.

BRILLIANT:

(Outside, calling) Sister! Sister!

GOLDEN:

Sister Brilliant's calling. I should go.
(Making as though to rise and go.)

BRILLIANT:

(Outside, nearer) Sister! Princess Golden!

TWINKLE:

(Pleading) Don't go. She's coming near.
Let her seek us. I want to hear.

BRILLIANT:

(Entering, right) Why, little sister,
Where *have* you been this hour?

GOLDEN:

I have been busy hearing things.

BRILLIANT:

But I have searched the Palace o'er
To tell you what *I've* heard.

*(She sits beside the others, who draw in closer—*TWINKLE *especially.)*

GOLDEN:

Oh, do tell us!

BRILLIANT:

There is not much to tell!
The court is all a-buzz.
Oh! There will be splendor on the Earth this night.
And one of us shall see it!

TWINKLE:

(Eagerly) Who, do you think, Princess Brilliant?

BRILLIANT:

(Carried on by her enthusiasm)

It is a prince's birthday eve.
His court will spring ablaze with light
And in his hands he will receive
Rich gifts from all the kingdoms of the world,
Rare gold, and gems of every hue.
Our King has sent his messenger
To call the Moonbeams here.

GOLDEN:

Has anyone learned more of this fair stranger
Who visits us—?

BRILLIANT:

The Splendid Stranger? Nay;
He tells his business only to our King.
But everyone is certain that 'tis he
Whose coming here has made this stir among us.

TWINKLE:

But, Princess Brilliant,
Why should the Moonbeams be thus called?
They are not of this court.

BRILLIANT:

Some reason of his own, I ween.

If one knew that, 'twere easy to know more.
Perhaps it is that they may see
The choosing of the one to take
The mighty prince the gift our King will send.

TWINKLE:

(To himself) A prince's birthday!
I wish that I might see it.—
Will you be chosen, Princess Golden?
Is that why you polished your crown?

(The crown has been lying beside GOLDEN, *who here tries to conceal it, but is unsuccessful.)*

BRILLIANT:

Why that crown is mine!

TWINKLE:

Your crown!

GOLDEN:

(Looking down) Yes, Sister Brilliant,
I want you to be chosen by our King,
You, who are so beautiful—and good.

BRILLIANT:

(Disappointed) But Sister Golden,
'Tis you who must be chosen.
I have shined your golden slippers
And left my crystal beads for you to wear.

GOLDEN:

(Rising quickly in surprise) I? Oh, sister, no!
(Lightly) Why, when the prince beheld me standing there
Outside his palace, he would stare
And cry, "O-ho!
What angry stepmother has sent
Her ugly daughter here?" No, no,
'Tis you must go.

*(*TWINKLE *has risen quietly and gone over to* WINKLE, *where he stands contemplating the sleeping elf.)*

BRILLIANT:

(Triumphantly) But *I* have sent a word
Unto the King, our father,
Asking him that *you* may be preferred.
So there!

GOLDEN:

(Crestfallen) That wasn't fair!

(Here TWINKLE *rouses himself, sighs deeply, takes* WINKLE'S *absurd little cap, and sitting down beside the bench, commences brushing it with his coat-sleeve.*

There is a sudden rumble of thunder outside, and the air darkens slightly. Twelve little STARS *come running in from several directions, crying out in excitement. They run and huddle about* GOLDEN *and* BRILLIANT *at the base of the throne, as though seeking sanctuary, hiding their eyes and covering their ears. There is one tremendous crash of thunder, very deep dusk, and several bright flashes of lightning. The wind rushes past and there is an instant of pitiless rain outside.*

This all passes in a moment, and as it recedes there is heard a peal of derisive laughter, OLD RUMBLE'S *laughter. The golden light gradually returns.—*WINKLE *is seen to be rising slowly, blinking, and rubbing his eyes.)*

WINKLE:

Did—did someone call me?

TWINKLE:

(Gravely, still working with TWINKLE'S *cap)*

Nay; you have but dreamed it.

A STAR:

(Faintly) Have they gone?

BRILLIANT:

Yes, little one.
Old Rumble and his three mean sons have passed.

(The STARS *look up one by one.)*

ANOTHER STAR:

(Timorously) I think I hear them yet!

GOLDEN:

But you are safe with us, and though your flight
Leaves all the skies in darkness for an hour,
Pray in the golden welcome of this palace
Where you have taken refuge, dance and sing
In happiness together.

A STAR:

(Clapping her hands for joy) Let us sing
The praises of our Gracious King!

(Light music. The STARS *sing "The Light-King," just as they sit, by now scattered out more or less.* TWINKLE *and* WINKLE, *the latter now awake, sit listening. At the close, they with* GOLDEN *and* BRILLIANT, *applaud lightly.)*

BRILLIANT:

And now a dance!
Come! Just as you dance on a summer's night,
Sparkling, glistening, radiant, bright.

(Again soft music. The STARS *form and dance to it. Just as the dance is about finished, it is apparently interrupted by the sound of the* HERALD'S *trumpet outside, left.)*

HERALD:

(Outside) Make beautiful,
Make beautiful the Palace of the Sun!
Make ready now the throne-room of the King!

(He enters briskly. Stands just inside the door.)

Children of the skies, I bid you hear.
The King of Light draws near.

(He crosses the stage and exit. The STARS *quietly form two lines extending fan-like from the throne steps. The* KING *enters, dressed in royal splendor, with crown and scepter. His train is carried by a tiny little* STAR-BOY. *As the* KING *enters, the* STAR-GIRLS *and the two princesses curtsy, and the* STAR-BOYS *and the elves remove their hats and kneel on one knee.*
On the top step of the throne the KING *turns, smiles down on them, and speaks:)*

KING:

My loyal stars, so golden in the skies,
My little ones, your Sovereign bids you rise.

(They do so. The KING *is seated, whereupon the* STARS *arrange themselves on the throne steps.)*

This is a blessed and a happy hour
In Heaven and Earth alike. We have a part
To play which must be quickly played.
This word our unknown visitor has brought—

TWINKLE:

(Excitedly to WINKLE*)* The Splendid Stranger!

(General agitation.)

KING:

Thus he has been called,
And by no fitter name could he be known.
It is my purpose that this Stranger make
His message known in his own words to all
My realm. It is for this I call
Us here about the throne in suddenness
This night.

HERALD:

(Enters from the right. Kneels on one knee before the throne)
My Sovereign—

KING:

Speak!

HERALD:

The children of the Moon have come.

KING:

Conduct them here.

*(*HERALD *rises and exit right.)*

And when they have come in
Straight may the telling of this wonder-tale begin.

(The HERALD *re-enters, stepping just inside the door to speak. Then stepping aside to let the Moonpeople in.)*

HERALD:

The children from the Moon, my Sovereign King.

*(*MOONMOTHER, *the* MOONBEAMS, *and* PERK *enter. All kneel before the throne except* MOONMOTHER, *who stands, slightly at one side, head bowed.* PERK *is in the middle;* SILVER, *bedraggled and miserable, next to him. All eyes seem to be on her. After a moment* MOONMOTHER *raises her head and speaks.)*

MOTHER:

Great King, the bright Moon-children loyal
Have come. They kneel here in thy palace royal
And to thine every wish allegiance swear.

KING:

Arise, my children. *(They do so.)*
I am proud to wear
The name you give me, and so sweetly given.
Pray have your seats.

(They sit at the sides, BRIGHT, CRYSTAL, PERK, *and* SILVER *at the left,* SILVER *nearest the door. The others at the right,* MOONMOTHER *nearest the door.)*

KING:

(Continuing) I have this night
Called all my realm together that I might
Acquaint you with a wondrous fact:
That soon the distant Earth is to be blessed
With such a gift as it has never had,
Nor ever shall again. And I am glad
My radiant family is to play a part
In this great giving.—Ho! My Herald!

*(*HERALD *enters as before.)*

Escort in honor here our stranger-guest.

(Exit HERALD.*)*

For one must hear the message that he bears,
In words from his own lips. Were I to try
To tell you what his coming here will mean,
You could not understand. But you shall know
The beauty and the meaning of this hour
When he has spoken.

(There grows gradually a state of expectancy among those in the throne-room; wonder, not fear. After the KING *ceases speaking, there is a pause of several seconds, during which* PERK *and* SILVER *take hold of each other's hand, and* TWINKLE *and* WINKLE *move furtively up closer to* BRILLIANT *and* GOLDEN, *as though for reassurance. This pause should not be long, but it should be eloquent. Attention is on the right door. Suddenly the* HERALD *steps quickly inside the door, without any announcement, and stands aside as before, but with his head bowed in reverence.*
There is another instant. Then the SPLENDID STRANGER *steps inside. As he enters, the place seems to brighten, losing much of its golden quality, before a brilliance which seems to radiate from the* STRANGER. *All regard him tensely for a moment; then one by one the heads are bowed. Little* SILVER, *enraptured, has slipped silently from her seat to her knees, where she kneels with her hands clasped. The* STRANGER'S *gaze, open and benign, takes in the entire group, finally resting upon* SILVER, *who bows her head last of all. The* STRANGER *is finely beautiful, but with masculine beauty. He wears a dazzling white toga, and his long golden hair falls nearly to his shoulders. His voice is serene, rich, full, and musical.)*

KING:

(Looking up) Speak to us, celestial messenger.
These bended heads our reverence declare.
Forgive these little ones for knowing not
They saw in thee an Angel unaware.

STRANGER:

I willed it that they should not know me thus
Until this hour had come.

(To the children, softly)

Be not afraid,
Let not your hearts be troubled.

(They look slowly up, and continue looking at him as he speaks. They are attentive, eager, as though spellbound by his stern beauty and gentle kindness.)

I bring you word from the realm of the Living God,
Whose way is Love, whose hand is over all.
That word is this: For ages God hath seen
His poor Earth-children groping for salvation,
Searching for the way that leads to him.
Now God would send them one to be their guide,
To know men's weaknesses, their joys and woes,
And win their souls by suffering and pain.

And He hath chosen for this His only Son
Who, all things being ready, must be born
A mortal man, in lowliness this night.—

(Richly)

His name shall be called "Jesus,"
Immanuel, the Prince of Peace.
No splendor will there be,
No signal fires agleam on land and sea,
No lighted palaces of joy and mirth.

(Turns to LIGHT-KING*)*

But God has asked that all the darkened Earth
Be filled with light before the break of morn
To glorify the place the Babe is born.

KING:

My daughter, Brilliant, this joy shall be thine.
And from this holy hour thy name shall be
No longer "Brilliant," but "Morning-Star."
The time draws near when thy blest self
Shall shine above the hills of Palestine.

*(*BRILLIANT *has risen and stands, radiant but trembling.)*

STRANGER:

The sight of thee and the angelic choir
The breasts of watching shepherds shall inspire;
And seeing thee, low in the purple skies,
Wise men will straightway come where Jesus lies.

BRILLIANT:

My father, sisters, and my brothers dear,
I scarce can speak. My heart fills all my breast,
And tears of gladness blind my happy eyes.—
O sister Golden, how little did we know
Of birthdays and of gifts!—My father, King,
I am not worthy of the sacred hour
In which I shall behold the dimpled smile
Of the new-born Prince. The Princess Golden,
Or any one of you, were just as fit as I—

SEVERAL STARS:

No, Sister, no!

GOLDEN:

No; thou art the loveliest Star of us,
The sweetest, deepest in humility.
Thou art the brightest, hast the softest voice.
Thou couldst most sweetly bid the Earth rejoice.

KING:

'Tis so.—Take thou thy place here at my right.

(MORNING STAR *steps up and seats herself on the top step close at the right hand of the* KING.—*The* KING *turns to Princess* GOLDEN)

And as for Princess Golden, from this night
Thou shalt be Evening Star, to glow against
The evening skies in memory of this hour.
Thy place is here.

(He indicates a like position at his left side. EVENING STAR, *having risen, takes her place silently.*—KING *turns to the* STRANGER)

But there is more to hear.

STRANGER:

There must be someone chosen yet who will
Attend the Morning Star; will hover near
The lowly birthplace on this sacred morn
And there so catch the spirit of God's love
That it will live on Earth, as now above
It lights the realm of God.—Nor is this all.

In time to come, when the first glad day has gone,
The chosen one for this shall stay on Earth,
To make it light, and fill it with a song.
Where-e'er this spirit finds the heart of man
Its duty is to fill it with the love
That blessed the place where Christmas time began.
But oft shall it know the sorrow and the pain,
The keen rebuff of labor spent in vain,
The suffering that the Prince born on this night
Will well have known before His life is done.

But still the task is blessed. More and more
The pain shall be forgotten as the rebuffs die,
The love be poured more free, 'till by-and-by
The Christmas Spirit, born with Christ this night,
Shall reign with Him in universal might,
Its throne within the heart of every man.

KING:

Moonmother, I have called thee here and thine
To see if I from them might choose
The proper one to send with Morning Star.

(MOONMOTHER *rises as she is addressed.* MOONBEAMS *smoothe out their frocks,—all except* SILVER *who draws toward* PERK. *He caresses her. Again the* STRANGER *rests his gaze on her.)*

MOTHER:

(Softly) Thy will is ours, O gracious Sovereign.

KING:

You, with the rest, have heard the message told,
With them have heard this latter task imposed.
How speak you for these children, one by one,
To tell their fitness, and what they have done?

MOTHER:

Were it not better that each Moon-beam tell,
Most gracious King, her own especial worth?
Each knows her doing on the distant Earth
Far better than do I.

KING:

That thought is good.
Call, then, each Moonbeam's name, and as you summon
Let each one speak to us, that we may judge.

MOTHER:

Then I call Crystal first.

(Each MOONBEAM, *as she is called, rises and takes a step or two toward the throne, curtsys, speaks, curtsys again, and retires.)*

CRYSTAL:

I always keep my dresses white and clean.
I am the gentlest Moonbeam ever seen.
I go to Earth to bless the calm night-air,
And to it, through it, whisper everywhere.

(As CRYSTAL *speaks of her dress,* SILVER, *after a moment of agony, slips quietly out and conceals herself behind the hanging. No one seems to notice her going except* MOON-MOTHER, PERK, *and the* STRANGER.
Note: The MOONBEAMS' *speeches are to be perfectly sincere, with nothing of vanity or affectation.)*

MOTHER:

I next call Sparkle.

SPARKLE:

Upon the ponds and lakes
I play and shimmer when the soft wind breaks
The surface of the water. Crystal knows me well.
Together we oft weave the moonlight spell
That binds with witchery the silent night.—
I think that either one of us two might
Be chosen for this task.

KING:

That we shall see.

MOTHER:

I next call Bright.

BRIGHT:

My mission is to shine
Alike on fields and woods, on hill and dale.
I kiss the grass, and draw a silver veil
About the sleeping flowers. I laugh and play
In all these places till the break of day.

MOTHER:

Then Nimble I call next.

NIMBLE:

I go to Earth
To cheer the Fairy Folk, to join their mirth.
I am important in the Fairies' play.
They cannot dance until I light the way.

MOTHER:

And Flicker now may speak.

FLICKER:

I haunt the ways
Of men; the city streets when calm night lays
The hand of silence on the noisy world.
I haunt the places where the shades unfurled
Float over sorrow, joy, o'er wakefulness
And sleep. I play on chamber floors and bless
Full many a house, in poverty or wealth,
Full many a soul, in sickness or in health.

KING:

Ah, this one moves me deepest in my heart.
'Tis not the fields and trees that are to need
Most urgently this Christmas love; nor yet
The Fairy Folk. It is the heart of man.
Accordingly, the Moonbeam that most knows
The haunts of men perchance will soonest find
The true depth of man's need.—Have I heard all?

MOTHER:

There yet is one, called Silver, who, I fear,
Will scarcely have the courage to appear
Before your Majesty. For by an act
Not yet explained she soiled her pretty dress,
Which we, because the midnight hour drew near,
Could not repair.

KING:

(Very kindly) Have Silver here. Where is she?

(MOONMOTHER *speaks here with her whole soul aroused to the defense of* SILVER.)

MOTHER:

But I knew full well, O King,
She had some reason, for in everything
She is most kind, unselfish, and the first
To rob herself for others.

STRANGER:

Love is greater than a crown.

(He speaks this softly, but very plainly, looking all the while where SILVER *has concealed herself.)*

KING:

Now I thirst
To see this Moonbeam, and to hear her speak.
Let her be called.

*(*MOONMOTHER *goes across, draws aside the hanging of the door, and reveals* SILVER, *her face buried in her hands. She tenderly lifts* SILVER *up and leads her toward the throne.)*

MOTHER:

Come, Silver dear.

(SILVER *tries to speak, but after a few faltering words she throws herself sobbing upon the lowermost step of the throne.)*

SILVER:

I—I am Silver, and unworthy, Lord.
And I—I—cannot speak!

KING:

Poor child! Can no one say
For her?

CRYSTAL:

(Eagerly) I can. As we set out this night,
My sister, Nimble, tore my veil of light.
And I was angry and began to whine;
But Silver gave me hers, and put on mine.—
Forgive me, little sister.

MOTHER:

What Crystal says is so; and this is too:
This evening while the Moonbeams made the dew,
My little Silver saw a thirsty field
That from the rest in some way was concealed.
Then, pity-filled, on that parched field she threw
Her love, and saved it, gave it life anew.

KING:

That sounds full well.

(He is thrilled and pleased.)

STRANGER:

Love is greater than a prince's crown.

(PERK *has been growing very restless. Finally plucks up courage, bounds out before the throne, where he falls on one knee and throws out his arms to the* KING *in supplication. His account begins very nervously, but gains control before it has proceded far.)*

PERK:

Thy pardon here, O King!

KING:

Rise then and speak.

PERK:

(Rising) Perk thus makes bold, My King.
But of this Moonbeam I must tell you more,
For I was with her when she did the deed
Which causes now her shame. There is no need
For weeping, and I now shall tell you why.

I went to Earth to call the Moonbeams back,
And found them all. When started toward the Moon,
We saw the distant storm-clouds, and heard Rumble
Calling to his sons with growl and grumble.
We hurried on as all the Stars went in.
But suddenly I saw this Silver pause,
And stopped beside her, asking her the cause,
As did her sisters all. She only gazed
Back toward the darkened Earth, half stunned, amazed,
And said, "On, sisters, on! But I must go
A moment back. They need me there below."

"Silver," I cried, "you must not do this thing!
(The rest went on) The wind in on the wing;
The Storm-King is about; his three sons lurk
To catch you!" But she said, "I *must* go, Perk."

(PERK *grows in dramatic intensity.)*

So went I with her, flying by her side,
And found that she returned to be the guide
Of two poor people traveling in the night.
A smiling, sweet-faced woman, by Silver's light
I saw. She on an ambling donkey rode.
Beside her strode
A fair, long-bearded man who, time to time,
Spoke cheeringly to keep her unafraid,

Calling her "Mary." "Joseph" she called him.
He often gazed upon her face sublime,
And wondered at the light that shone around.

We found at last a village in the hills.
We stood before the tavern door with them.
We heard the keeper say there was no room.
We heard Old Rumble roaring in the gloom.
By Silver's light found they a stable then,
And made their resting there.

And now again
This Silverbeam and I turned home. 'Twas dark.
The Storm-King roared, and like an ugly spark,
His son, called Flame, the pitchy darkness cleaved.
He made us visible; and Swift, his brother, came
And knocked us down. Delighted with the game,
The other son, called Cloud, drenched us with rain.

But all our efforts had been made in vain
Had not Old Silence, out of his great love
For Silver, come and carried her above.

Thus we reached home; and thus it is, I say,
That she, my little playmate, hides away.
Those poor, soiled garments cover there a heart
That is of God's own realm a noble part.
(He bows jerkily and retires. There is an instant's pause. The STRANGER'S *face is aglow.)*

KING:

This is best of all! We do in no wise know
Who these poor travelers were. But this is so:
They were in need, and in peril were they led.—
And woulds't thou not, O Splendid Stranger, place
Thy choice upon this little Moonbeam here?

STRANGER:

(His eyes raised; speaks as though entranced.)
He called her "Mary"; "Joseph", she called him.—
(Turning) It must be so, for God hath chosen for us.
This Moonbeam, speeding bravely back to guide
Those lonely travelers through the storm and night,
Hath shone already in that hallowed place
And made this night, in our Prince's blessed name,
Her first rich offering of devotion.
(Triumphantly) Love is greater than a prince's crown,
Love is greater than a crown.

KING:

(*To* MORNING STAR) My daughter, she is chosen.

(MORNING STAR *rises and steps down to where* SILVER *lies, and lifts her up by the hand.)*

MORNING STAR:

I raise thee up, my sister. Thou of all
Most fitted art to hear God's holy call.—
'Tis my desire, My King, as it is God's and thine,
That Silver be this messenger divine
To carry to the ages yet unborn
The eternal meaning of the Christmas morn.

(With the last four lines MORNING STAR *turns to the* KING, *raising her arms so that* SILVER *is hidden from the audience. When* MORNING STAR *ceases speaking she lowers her arms and stands aside revealing* SILVER *dressed in radiant costume, re-created.* MORNING STAR *and* SILVER *kneel. The rest rise.)*

KING:

I am glad,
So glad that words are powerless.—Morning Star,
My eldest daughter, now art thou
For this glad day, the Star of Bethlehem.
Thou leavest us but briefly; returnest soon
To light the morning skies, a loved reminder
Of the birthday thou shalt soon proclaim.—
Sweet Silverbeam, regenerated now
By thy pure heart, I do rename thee too:
Thou art the Christmas Spirit. Thou shalt go
To spread the love of service and the joy
Of giving on the Earth.

STRANGER:

And thou shalt live forever,
Suffering, enduring all things and failing not,
Seeking not thine own, and vaunting not,
Nor envying, but being always kind;
Forever incarnate joy and happiness.

KING:

I bless you to these missions.
And now, my own, be gone. The Holy Day
Will soon be breaking. Be upon your way.

(They rise and turn to go.)

BETHLEHEM STAR:

Briefly then, farewell, my sisters and my brothers.

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT:

I still am speechless; but this time, for joy.
Though still I feel unworthy, I am chosen.

(She goes to MOONMOTHER *and kisses her.)*

Farewell, Moonmother.—Sisters all, farewell.
And Perk—

(Just a tinge of sadness.)

PERK:

(Softly) Perk will miss you, Silver, more than any.

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT:

(Smiling) You I shall remember always, Perk.
Be kind to them. *(Indicating the other* MOONBEAMS.)

(PERK *nods, unable to trust his voice perhaps.* CHRISTMAS SPIRIT *and* BETHLEHEM STAR *walk toward the right exit. Before it they turn and the* CHRISTMAS SPIRIT *speaks—perhaps to us all.)*

Would ye be sad? Not so. To you I bring
The blessing of this long-awaited hour.
This is the birthday of the Prince. I take
No glittering gift to Him, but even now
Become His everlasting gift to you.—
Take me, give me lodging in your hearts:
Loving kindness will shine round about you,
The peace that passeth understanding dwell within you,
And lo, I shall be with you always.

(The two turn toward the exit, pause ever so slightly, then go out, MORNING STAR *slightly ahead leading the* CHRISTMAS SPIRIT *by the hand.*

There is a moment's pause; then the sound of voices (women's) singing, as though in the great distance, the song floating across the stretches of space and down all the ages:)

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Peace on Earth,
Good will toward men.
Peace on Earth,
Good will toward men.

(All in the throne-room bow their heads in awe and reverence, except the SPLENDID STRANGER, *who stands as though glorified, his eyes raised on high. The curtain closes slowly on the last strains of the song.)*

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